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## Bear or 'orso'? Translating gay bear culture into Italian

Antonio Gualardia and Michela Baldo

### 1. Gay bears from the US to Italy

The gay bear phenomenon was born in California in 1966 where a group of gay men began to gather at the Satyr, a Los Angeles-based MC club. However, it was only between 1986 and 1987, with the publication in San Francisco of a local underground magazine called BEAR, that this became a well-known term, able to define a certain type of gay man. It is not easy to describe what a bear is and the debate between physical versus attitude traits is still far from being solved. People defining themselves with this totemic persona have usually a large or husky body, heavy body hair; they have an epicurean appetite and they are happy with their own masculinity as well-described in some seminal works on the topic by scholars such as Wright (1997; 2001). According to Wright (1997: 7) 'we are not dealing with a well-organized, members-only, card-carrying association or we cannot even label it a "movement" since there is no agreed upon or articulated program for social change. It is the advent of a pervading spirit that is often more a shared personal experience'.

This new phenomenon deconstructs the standards of beauty or in general the gay mainstream image imposed by the media (young, smooth-skinned, gym buffed) which tries to control and label the gay identity as feminized and (or) weak, and recreates a new way of 'being gay': a new way, as Wright states (1997: 6), which supports the 'come as you are code', and which is the result of a movement 'from mimesis (acting myself) to authenticity (being myself)'.

The bear movement, initially confined to the West and East coasts, rapidly found favour with gay men everywhere in the United States. The number of bear groups and clubs, and bear-related magazines, shops, and mail-order companies has continued to grow, almost exponentially, since the 80s. The real explosion of this phenomenon, though, in the late 80s and during the



90s, was through the internet. The lines of communication are numerous and diverse and have evolved over time: from live chat lines to electronic bulletin boards and social networks. Cyberspace is a virtual place where people can maintain and establish contact anonymously, exchanging visual images or simply indicating their favorite sexual icon. These are usually self-advertising web sites based on one's appearance without revealing one's name or location, ranging from sexual encounters to personal friendships and life partners. The first gay bear-dedicated chat room was called Bearcave, and by far the most popular cyberspace is the Bears Mailing List (BML) founded in 1988 by Steve Dyer and Brian Gollum (Wright 1997: 33).

The internet contributed also to the spread of the gay bear phenomenon across the Atlantic into Europe.<sup>1</sup> Using English as lingua franca, American dating websites were first absorbed by the UK and Ireland and with time reached other non-English speaking countries, Italy included.

In 1992, after the publication of a local magazine called *Orsitalliani* (Italian Bears), people who were self-proclaimed 'bears' organized the first Italian bear party in a Milan-based club called Querele.<sup>2</sup> Since then the number of bear-clubs and events and internet sites has increased tremendously from north to south all over the country. In 1994 the first Italian bear-related magazine went on line with the name of <http://www.orsitalliani.com/>, featuring a list of various dedicated links including personal ads, galleries, short stories, appointments and tourism.<sup>3</sup>

The aim of the magazine was to introduce the gay bear phenomenon into the Italian sphere as stated on the homepage of the website: 'Non abbiamo quindi inventato niente: abbiamo semplicemente importato in Italia un'esperienza, una realtà' aggregata che all'interno della comunità omosessuale esiste da parecchi decenni in tutto il mondo' (*we did not invent anything: we have just imported an experience, a reality that has been consolidated all over the world within the gay community for years*).<sup>4</sup>

1. The gay bear phenomenon spread initially into Europe from the US through the importation of some porn videos in the late 70s.

2. Information taken from <http://www.orsitalliani.com/>

3. The other links are: orsi e sport (bears & sport), orsi e musica (bears & music), orsi e pubblicità (bears & ads), orsi nei media (bears & media), disegni (artworks) and articoli (articles).

4. <http://www.orsitalliani.com/>

## 2. Queer diasporas, globalisation and translation

The diffusion of the bear phenomenon worldwide and specifically in Italy (starting from the magazine *Orsitalliani* and then mainly through the internet), has resulted in the translation of gay bear related terms and concepts from American English or British English into Italian. Along with the web, translation has played and is still playing a major role in the formation of a gay bear community in Italy.

This article, thus, deals with the migration of queer concepts and so with translation as well, understood as a form of textual migration. Translation means to transfer, 'to move. It is traditionally understood as a practice that involves taking something away from a place and moving it into another, as a journey that 'begins in itself and, after a great elliptical trajectory, returns to itself mutated, new, and ready to begin again' (Verdicchio 1997: 111). In this sense translation is linked to migration studies, which deals with phenomena such as displacement and resettlement, as confirmed by Cronin (2006: 45): '[t]he condition of the migrant is the condition of the translated being [...]'. Translation takes place both in the physical sense of movement or displacement and in the symbolic sense of the shift from one way of speaking, writing about and interpreting the world to another.'

Migration enters the picture as an important term not only in discussions of translation but also of sexuality. Eithne Luibheid (2008: 169) claims that sexuality scholarship has started to explore how the age of migration is centrally implicated in the construction, regulation and reworking of sexual identities, communities, politics and cultures. Cindy Patton and Benigno Sanchez in their edited book, *Queer diasporas* (2000), view queer as a peripatetic mode of sexuality, in which the queer subject becomes a doubly mobile, transgressive body, who challenges not simply the repertoire of localized categories of desire but the stability of national identity itself. As stated by Wesling (2008: 33), 'The queer diasporic body is doubly disarticulated from the strais of sexual and national normativity.' The queer subject is thus a mobile subject, first because gay people have often traveled to escape intolerance (Morgan, Pritchard and Sedgley 1998) and secondarily because 'much of the search of a homosexual identity necessarily involves travel' (Hughes 1997: 5), often of a psychological nature. Migration is thus a movement through national and cultural borders like queerness is a movement across the boundaries imposed



by gender (Wesling 2008: 31).

If queer diaspora/migration explores the multiple conjunctions between queer and migration, a consideration of queer translation, such as this article undertakes, should explore those between queer and translation, by putting emphasis on the translation and migration of concepts rather than just of bodies. A few works have appeared so far on the topic of queer translation (see for example the work of Keith Harvey (2003) on the translation of American camp talk into French) and so this should constitute an important contribution to the field.

Here we will explore not only the links between queer and translation but also those between queer translation and globalization as the queer subject, by being a migrant who troubles geographical and national stability, is also the exemplary subject of globalization (Cruz-Malave and Manalansan IV 2002: 2). This is exemplified very well by the fact that gay bear websites have promoted the global circulation of gay bear images and ideas.

However, globalization is also involved in a commodification of queer (Wesling 2008: 33). It is thus important to note that in this article we will not only look at gay bear migrations/translations as transgressive or liberating modes of existence, but will also discuss them in their dialogue with normative positions and forms of rootedness and home-making (Brah 1996; Fortier 2001; Gopinath 2005; Wesling 2008: 35).

### 3. Gay bears in cyberspace: 'orso', bear or what?

The aim of this article is thus to investigate how or to what extent the gay bear phenomenon has travelled into the Italian culture (mainly through the web), or, in other words,

- a) How are gay bear terms translated into Italian?
- b) How are gay bear terms perceived by the Italian gay bear internet users?

In order to answer these questions we surveyed a number of international websites whose language is American/English (some of which were translated or partially translated into different languages, including Italian) and a few others in Italian. We then extracted a list of the most used identity-related terms and proposed a questionnaire (see appendix) to a group of thirty Italian

men<sup>5</sup>, who relate to the gay bear culture, asking them both to state their preferred websites (either in American/English or Italian), and to identify themselves or their ideal partner using one or more of the terms of the list proposed.

Through the websites' survey and the questionnaires we hoped to get an understanding of how the gay bear culture has been translated into Italian and how Italian gay bear men build their identity through the use of dating websites.

The websites analyzed, whose main language was English, were *bearworld*, *eurowoolf*, *bearlounge*, and *bear247*. *Bearworld* is one of the most used multi-language, bear-related and dating websites in Europe. Through a dedicated page, where there is a list of terms, briefly explained and translated for each language,<sup>6</sup> new users can create a self-advertising profile by adding pictures, describing themselves and their object of desire.

In the Italian language section of this website, we found a group of terms which were either translated into Italian (with the translation appearing in brackets) or beside which an explanation in Italian was given (or both). The list is as follows: bear, translated as 'orso', and described as hairy man, more or less big; cub, translated as 'cucciolo' and described as young guy, hairy or big; chubby described as big man with little or no body hair; daddy, translated as 'papà/uomo maturo' (dad, mature man) and described as mature man; polar bear, described as someone with grey hair; chaser, translated as 'predatore' (predator) and described as someone who likes bears, cubs, daddies or chubbies; muscled bear, which was not translated into Italian and was described as someone who must be muscled; pair, translated as 'coppia' (couple) and admirer, translated as 'ammiratore' and described as someone who likes hairy men and that can be big or slim.<sup>7</sup>

5. Age range 30–50.

6. The languages available are English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Portuguese, Dutch, Catalan and Italian.

7. This terminology has been extensively analyzed in Wright (1997) and is found also on [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear\\_\(gay\\_culture\)#Terminology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear_(gay_culture)#Terminology). Bear usually indicates a hairy man with a stocky or heavy-set build and facial hair. Chaser or admirer is a person who is attracted sexually or romantically to bears. Cub is usually a younger bearish man, often indicates a man who is hairy, but is not large or stocky – typically thinner, swimmer's build, or with lean muscle. Daddy bear indicates an older bear, sometimes looking for a daddy/son relationship with a younger man. Moreover Wright, in his work, uses another classification created by Bob Donahue and Jeff Stoner called "The Natural Bears Classification System" (NBCS or the bear code) which is a set of symbols using letters, numbers and other characters commonly found on modern western computers keyboards. Please see [wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Natural\\_Bears\\_Classification\\_System](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Natural_Bears_Classification_System)



For the other websites analyzed, we found the following:

1. eurowoof copies almost entirely bearwww;
2. bearworld does not add an explanation to the terms related to the typologies of gay bears and translates into Italian only bear and cub (respectively as 'orso' and 'cucciolo');
3. bearlounge translates into Italian the following terms (appearing in the Italian section without English equivalent): 'orso' (bear), 'cucciolo' (cub), 'ammiratore' (admirer), 'cacciatore' (chaser), 'grasso' (fat), 'maturo' (mature) and 'orso muscoloso' (muscle bear);
4. bear247 gives the Italian translation (which appears in brackets beside the English word) of the following terms: bear (orso), admirer (ammiratore), cub (cucciolo), chub (orsone), leather bear (orso pelle), panda bear (orso panda), polar bear (orso polare), chaser (cacciatore), daddy bear (papà orso), otter (lontra) and wolf (lupo).

Then we focused on Italian gay bear websites such as *orsitaliani*, *portorso* and *orsi in Sicilia*. *Orsitaliani*, the first Italian gay bear website to appear in Italy (as explained in the introduction), does not contain a section with gay bear-related terms unlike *portorso*, which offers a glossary of gay bear-related terms and features a list of gay bear links. In *portorso* we found that the gay bear terminology is not translated from English (apart from terms such as 'gazzella', 'secca', 'lontra' and 'papà orso'<sup>8</sup>) but explained in Italian. The Italian descriptions of these identity markers follow those of the international websites previously analyzed. However, new terms are introduced and explained here: gainer, a term related to fat fetishism;<sup>9</sup> grizzly, a very big and also aging bear; hairy people with massive facial or body hair; husky,

synonymous with bear;<sup>10</sup> leather, a culture eroticizing leather dress and often associated with BDSM and kink cultures.<sup>11</sup> As regards the terms translated into Italian, 'lontra' is the Italian translation of otter;<sup>12</sup> it also appears in *orsi in Sicilia* (a website very similar to *orsi italiani*) and indicates a very thin and hairy person. The term is sometimes used instead of chaser or admirer or even wolf, while 'gazzella' (literally, gazelle), also referred to as 'secca' (literally, tiny and slim person), indicates a very thin and hairless person.

From the websites analyzed we see the presence of codeswitched terms (both in the Italian sections of the international websites and in the Italian websites):<sup>13</sup> English and Italian appear often the one beside the other. The translation strategies used to aid the internet users are thus either the literal translation of the English term into Italian, which appears on its own or follows the English terms in what Vizcaino calls a translation couplet (2005), or the non-literal translation or paraphrase into Italian following the English terms (Rudin 1996: 141; see also Bandia 1996: 141-142).

We extracted all the terms, both the English and the Italian ones, from the websites analyzed and mixed them in a random order in the questionnaire we proposed to our participants. With the first question of the questionnaire we wanted to see which language was most used by the participants in their self-description. The most used terms were bear (21 out of 30 participants), 'orso' (16 out of 30 participants), cub, admirer and 'ammiratore' (5 out of 30 participants) and 'cucciolo' (4 out of 30 participants). Some people chose both the English and its Italian equivalent for bear/'orso' (14 out

10. This term is explained as 'American slang indicating a very corpulent person' ([www.portorso.com/](http://www.portorso.com/)).

11. The compound acronym BDSM is derived from the following terms: bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism. According to Wikipedia this BDSM is 'a type of role-play or lifestyle choice between two or more individuals who use their experiences of pain and power to create sexual tension, pleasure, and release. Activities and relationships within a BDSM context are characterized by the fact that the participants usually take on complementary, but unequal, roles, thus the idea of Consent of both the partners becomes essential in any activity. Typically, participants who are active – applying the activity or exercising control over others – are known as tops or dominants. Those participants who are recipients of the activities, or who are controlled by their partners, are typically known as bottoms or submissives.' <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bdsm>.

12. This term is kept both in English and Italian in the website.

13. Codeswitching is defined in syntactic terms as 'the alternative use by bilinguals of two or more languages in the same conversation [...] it can occur between the turn of different speakers in conversation, sometimes even within a single utterance' (Milroy and Maysken 1995: 7-8).



of 30), cub/'cucciolo' (3 out of 10), admirer/'ammiratore' (5 out of 30), couple/'coppia' (3 out of 30), muscle bear/'orso muscoloso' (1 out of 30). The most unknown terms were 'lontra', gainer and 'gazzella' (4 out of 30 participants did not know the term; all the others ignored it), hairy (3 out of 30 did not know the term; all the others ignored it), and leather (2 out of 30 participants did not know the term and all the others ignored it). All the other terms showed irrelevant figures<sup>14</sup>.

With the second question we wanted to see whether the participants preferred Italian or international websites and if their choice was determined by their knowledge of English or not.

For eighteen people, the language of the website was not relevant: eight people preferred international websites because in their opinion they are more user-friendly and contain better-quality pictures. Only three respondents preferred Italian gay bear sites. The knowledge of English language does not seem to play an important role for this choice: most of the participants professed to have a good level of written English.<sup>15</sup>

With the third question we wanted to know if the respondents found the international bear sites better than the Italian ones. Twenty-four participants out of thirty replied that international sites are far better than the Italian ones but they did not explain the reasons for this.<sup>16</sup> Three people think that they are the same; one does not know how to answer; and only one person thinks that Italian sites are better. One of the respondents who answered that websites were all the same declared the importance of the visual aspect of them: 'I siti sono tutti uguali, l'importante sono le foto che metti!' (*Internet sites are all the same, the pictures you post are the important thing*). This might be explained with the commodification of the gay identity in cyberspace, and with a general consumerist view induced by globalization (Wesling 2008).

The answers to these three questions also show how the gay bear phenomenon has not been entirely absorbed by the Italian gay bear audience. Only terms such as bear, admirer and cub seem to be accepted and recognized, terms which are also the most translated into Italian in the websites we surveyed. Other terms like husky and grizzly which are more American-

culture specific,<sup>17</sup> are almost unknown. The term leather has been completely ignored as a choice for self-definition, probably because it is linked with the idea of pain typical of the cultures revolving around the sexual practices of SM, which are not very popular among gay bears in Italy.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the answer to the first question proposed in the questionnaire shows the considerable confusion and interchangeability of linguistic options available for self-definition, in particular in the use of both bear and 'orso' alongside one another. Rather than being explained by the degree of English knowledge possessed by the respondents,<sup>19</sup> a more accurate explanation may rest on the fact that 'bear' is not the exact translation of 'orso' but rather a fashionable borrowed term, that is a term that has become part of the Italian lexicon (Myers-Scotton 1993: 192; Callahan 2005: 6-10)<sup>20</sup> and which links the Italian gay bear community to its prestigious American cousins.

With the fourth question we asked the participants to tell us the kind of men they were attracted to, and to name at least three characteristics they sought in their ideal partner. One respondent did not answer, only six participants used English definitions among those provided in the questionnaire, while all the others (23 out of 30) used Italian adjectives or terms in order to describe their object of desire. For the positive characteristics, they used the following physical-related adjectives, nouns and phrases: 'maschile' (masculine), 'peloso' (hairy), 'deve avere un bel viso, belle manone' (he must have a nice face, nice big hands), 'deve essere robusto e villosso' (he must be robust and hairy), 'torollo' (bull), and 'bella stazza' (huge frame).

Other participants used attitude-related adjectives: 'allegro', 'gioviale' and 'simpatico' (happy, jovial and likeable). With regard to negative characteristics most respondents did not answer, while others used the noun 'duchessa'

17. The North American grizzly bear, which lives in Canada and in the USA, evokes images of woodsmen, lumberjacks, mountain men, the Brokeback Mountain man type who does not belong to the collective Italian imagination.

18. This would conflict with the reassuring image of bears that has been found in the questionnaire.

19. For most of the users of the international websites analyzed, English is not their mother tongue. Therefore English is considered a lingua franca which allows people coming from different countries to communicate with each other.

20. Myers-Scotton (1993: 192) defines as borrowings words that have entered the monolingual lexicon of the host language and occur more frequently, and as codeswitches those words that are accessible to bilingual speakers only and are less frequent (see also Callahan 2005: 10).



(duchess),<sup>21</sup> 'gazella' (gazelle),<sup>22</sup> and the adjective 'effeminato' (effeminate). One respondent in particular declared 'I don't understand feminine gays. It's people like them who give straight people permission to bash us. I hate it when I see them in our events.'

This comment can be explained by the fear of stereotyping usually attributed to effeminate gay people in Italy. Most gay bear events in Italy, which are only for card-carrying members ('Tessera Arcigay'), are marred by verbal clashes between gay bears and other gay effeminate men. Among the gay club goers there are also married men who, heterosexual in the public eye because not effeminate and so 'invisible', hope to find a safer place where they can express themselves and their real sexual attitudes which they cannot express in other public spaces.<sup>23</sup> This shows how the sense of isolation, invisibility and silence that is often the result of homophobia (which still has a hugely negative impact on many people in Italy as shown also by the reluctance of many gay bears contacted to participate in our research<sup>24</sup>) may cause another type of phobia, the '[...] intrahomophobia, that is, the phobia of homosexuals within the homosexual community, [which] is in fact a mechanism of self-defense, by which some gay men try to avoid stigmatization from the larger heterosexual community who has historically depicted gay men as feminine in order to make them inferior, but above all visible' (Gustavo, Solé and Carabi 2009).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The term 'duchessa' is derogatory because it implies the characteristics of takenness and arrogance associated with the aristocracy and contrary to the working class image projected by gay bears.

<sup>22</sup> Note that these terms are feminine nouns in Italian. This underlines a binary conception where "male" means strong and "female" means delicate and weak (Mosse 1985; Harris 1997; Lingrandi 1997; Bergling 2001 and Corbett 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Most gay men in Italy lead a double life: heterosexual with wives and children to the public eye, gay club goers in the private life. This tendency to hide, which is partly due to the Catholic restrictions, results in the creation of new hidden spaces for gay people. Most Italian gay clubs are 'places to hide' whose entrances do not have neon lights or flashing letterings. This is not valid only for clubs but for all gay meeting areas. In the Orsitalliani.com tourism section, there is a dedicated page on gay "very isolated" beaches in Lombardy. It features a full description of the 'winding' route (in English and in Italian) to reach the beach. It says: 'It's a twenty-minute easy walk but it's worth it. [...] the place is isolated so bring plenty of water with you'. <http://www.orsitalliani.com/vizzolaeng.html>

<sup>24</sup> Only thirty participants out of fifty agreed to fill out the questionnaire that we proposed. Most people (married men with children, or just people who were not out as gay) were reluctant to answer because they were scared to be outed even if we told them that the questionnaire was anonymous.

<sup>25</sup> 'Invisibility is a privilege [...] a luxury [...] because when you are the dominant power [...] you need not draw attention to yourself as a specific entity, but, rather, you can pretend to be the generic, the universal' (Kimmel 2004: 56).

With the fifth (and final) question we wanted to know which job the ideal partner of the participants should have. Most people chose professions such as 'poliziotto' (policeman), 'pompieri' (fireman), for the reassuring look these people infuse, and for the fact that they are considered to be 'male' professions. Others opted for professions such as 'camionista' (lorry-driver), 'idraulico' (plumber), 'muratore' (builder) and 'tecnico del contatore' (gas-meter man) because they are considered male professions for rough men. Some others chose a profession such as 'operaio' (worker) because it is associated with simplicity. These results perfectly comply with the idea of bears who do not 'fit into the stereotypical image of the urban gay man and who, therefore, projects a working-class image [...] away from the feminized image attributed to gay' (Gustavo, Solé and Carabi 2009: 1).

Italian bear site users thus, when describing the object of desire, mainly used their mother tongue which, according to linguists such as Gumperz (1982), is the language of emotions. Moreover, they all use adjectives and terms describing the characteristics of macho men resembling those found in a particular 'filone' (genre)<sup>26</sup> of Italian films: 'La commedia all'italiana' (the Italian sexy comedy). Here we find men often sexually aroused and who are employed in manual jobs which require some degree of physical strength.

This filmic genre developed during the late 60s and 70s as a reaction to the previous Italian movie tradition which was linked with fascist censorship. Those films were never pornographic but played on sexy-comic situations. The plots were always the same: revolving around want-to-be super machos who try to have sex with beautiful young girls discovering their sexuality or with women already sexually mature and frustrated because of boring or absent husbands. The male figures are always explicit in their sexual approach or in displaying their masculinity, which always debouches into chauvinism. They usually have a heavy, hairy body and no matter how hard they try to conquer women (they dress up as plumbers or as gas-meter men<sup>27</sup>), sexual acts are never consummated because of comic hitches.<sup>28</sup> These men, generally emigrants from Southern Italy, are always associated with words belonging

<sup>26</sup> In Italian the term 'filone' indicates a strand of similar movies made in a relatively short period of time (Wood 2005: 37).

<sup>27</sup> The respondent who used this term added a little story which echoes the plots of sexy comedy films: 'Mi piace l'idea di un uomo che si intrufola in casa con una scusa per far sesso' (I like the idea of a man who sneaks into my house with an excuse to have sex).

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.lifeitaly.com/italian-movies/sexy-comedies.asp>



to the sphere of animality to emphasize their sexual performances:<sup>29</sup> 'toro' (bull), 'torello' (bullock), 'merlo' (blackbird).<sup>30</sup>

*Orsitiani* offers a special page containing sexually related stories which hint at these plots. In some stories the first-person character/narrator, a self-identified gay man, plays the part of the sexual slave. The others, generally corpulent lorry-drivers or workers, have an active role echoing the heterosexual male during the sexual encounter.<sup>31</sup> In these cases the passive bear thus plays the role that the woman had in the Italian 'commedia'. In other examples, especially those between partners with huge age gaps (daddy/son relationship), or characters involving policemen or firemen, there is a lot of emphasis put on cuddling as the ultimate intimate sexual act and this is reflected also in the answers by those participants to our questionnaire who love the sense of protection transmitted to them by firemen and policemen. Although nurturance is not salient in the discourse of gay bears as it clashes with the rejection of all that is feminine in gay bear culture, it seems more marked in the rhetorical and iconographic public presentations of bears as teddy bear-like (Wright 2001: 340). This image of nurturance is thus what makes gay bears in general and Italian ones in particular different from those heterosexual men found in 'Commedia all' italiana': it is what queers them.

#### 4. Conclusions

This article has tried to understand the role of translation in the diffusion of the gay bear culture into Italy. Through a survey of international and Italian websites and a questionnaire given to a group of thirty Italian gay bears, we found that despite the preference by the respondents for international websites whose language is American or British English, only a few English terms have been imported into Italian, terms such as bear, admirer and cub which are often interchanged with their respective Italian translations ('orso', 'ammiratore' and 'cucciolo'). The respondents have shown little or no knowledge of other

29. Many gay bears use the term "woof" (which usually refers to the sound that dogs make) as a common greeting. This term is found in the following websites: [www.bearwww.com](http://www.bearwww.com) and [www.porsoso.com](http://www.porsoso.com).

30. One of the most important films belonging to the Italian sexy comedy tradition is called *'Il Merlo maschio'* (1971) (The male blackbird) (<http://www.pagine70.com/vmmnews/vmmview.php?ArtID=86>). The cinema poster features a cellist playing a woman-shaped violin.

31. An extract of one of these stories from [orsitiani.com](http://orsitiani.com) reports these words: 'I liked Pietro a lot. He was not gay nor bi-sex but he was a real male [...] Mario was very confident of his masculinity that is why I loved him!'

English terms of bear identification. They have shown confusion about the meaning of some of these terms and have largely used Italian in describing their object of desire.

The presence of English codeswitched/borrowed words, along with their explanations in Italian, and of others partially translated and of mis-translated terms, or even of Italian terms in Italian websites which are already adapted from international ones, is the sign of the hybridity and in a sense queerness of the linguistic and cultural journey of Italian gay bears between worlds (an international scene as opposed to an Italian one), a journey/translation which constantly mixes source and target texts.

It shows that the gay bear phenomenon is still a new born baby in Italy and that gay bears are in the process of building their group identity through a constant journey made of borrowing, codeswitching, translating and paraphrasing the foreign but at the same time through inventing and adapting that foreign into the local. What is taken from the foreign and imported into Italian are various concepts among which it is interesting to notice the idea of nurturance, expressed by the term 'cucciolo', and stressed also in the popular representation of bears worldwide. As for the specificities of the adaptation of gay bear culture into Italy, these are shown in the Italian reference to images taken from the popular filmic Italian culture of the 70s, in which the Mediterranean heterosexual macho man shares many characteristics with those supposedly owned by gay bears (see Wright 2001: 260). This can also possibly explain the popularity of the term 'ammiratore' in Italy, a figure which seems to mimic the heterosexual divide: gay bear/heterosexual non gay bear man, also found in many story plots of the website [www.orsitiani.it](http://www.orsitiani.it). The (mis)translation of daddy bear with 'papà orso' (father bear instead of older or more mature bear) also shows the importance of the traditional imagery of the family within the Italian sphere.

Behind this domestication of concepts there is certainly among the Italian bears a desire to pass as heterosexual men, a desire which is the outcome of the repressive power exerted by the Church against gay men in general, and which makes them hide in the anonymity of the web. This cultural climate, along with a consumerist attitude lying behind the dating websites in general, might explain why the Italian queer bear subject is still at the beginning of his journey of negotiation between transgressions and local repressive normative positions.



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<http://www.orsitaliani.com/>  
<http://www.portorso.net/>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear\\_\(gay\\_culture\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bear_(gay_culture))  
<http://www.lifeinitaly.com/italian-movies/sexy-comedies.asp>  
<http://www.pagine70.com/vmnews/vmview.php?ArtID=86>

#### Appendix

Questionnaire Survey carried out during the summer 2010.

##### First question:

In quali delle seguenti definizioni, spesso presenti nei siti internet, ti identifichi maggiormente? Metti una X accanto al termine che meglio ti rappresenta. Metti uno 0 accanto al termine che non conosci o che non hai mai sentito.  
 (Which one of the following definitions is able to define yourself the most? Please put an X next to the term that best describes you. Please put 0 next to the unknown term.)

##### Second question:

Ppreferisci accedere ai siti gay bear in inglese/Americano, con traduzione italiana, o preferisci siti completamente in italiano? Credi che la tua scelta sia legata alla tua conoscenza dell'inglese?  
 (Do you prefer to use international gay bear sites whose main language is English, international sites offering Italian translations or do you prefer Italian ones? Do you think that this choice is linked with your knowledge of English?)

##### Third question:

Credi che i siti internazionali siano meglio di quelli italiani?  
 (Do you think that international bear sites are better than the Italian ones?)

##### Fourth question:

Qual è la tipologia di uomo che ti attira maggiormente? Per rispondere a questa domanda puoi trarre spunto dalle definizioni presenti al punto 1 ed elencare almeno 3 caratteristiche che un uomo deve assolutamente avere e 3 che non deve avere per attirarti.  
 (What kind of man do you feel attracted to the most? To answer this question you can use some definitions you have found in the first question. Please list three characteristics that your man of desire should have and 3 that he should not.)

##### Fifth question:

Nel tuo immaginario erotico, quale lavoro deve fare il tuo uomo ideale? Motiva le tue scelte.  
 (In your erotic imaginative world, which job should your ideal man have? Please give reasons for your choice.)